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A NEW YEAR'S ADDRESS

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NEW YEAR'S ADDRESS

TO THE PATRONS OF
THE ESSEX GAZETTE

1828

WITH A LETTER, HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED

BY

JOHN G. WHITTIER



✓
BOSTON

CHARLES E. GOODSPEED

1903

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Haverhill 5th of 3rd Mo., 1828.

FRIEND WELD

I rece'd thy letter a few days ago, and am very much oblig'd to thee for it. I am happy to think that I am not entirely forgotten by those for whom I have always entertain'd the most sincere regard. I recollect perfectly well that (on one occasion in particular) after hearing thy animated praises of Milton and Thomson, I attempted to bring a few words to rhyme and measure: but whether it was poetry, or prose run mad, or as Burns says "something that was rightly neither," I cannot now ascertain. Certain I am, however, that it was in a great measure owing to thy admiration of those poets, that I ventur'd on that path which their memory has hallow'd, in pursuit of—I myself hardly know what—Time, alone, must determine. The Rocks Bridge will I suppose be completed this year. I am really glad of it, but it unfortunately happens that I have incurr'd the displeasure of some of the worthies of that Village.

An unlucky New Year's Address publish'd in the Ess. Gaz. has call'd down upon me the anathemas of some half a dozen, who felt that they or their follies were alluded to. I have learn'd, however, that it is an unthankful task to lash vice and prejudice, for

*"None e'er felt the halter draw
With good opinion of the law."*

I really do not know of any thing to tell thee of, which will make my scrawl interesting. My sister Mary is married to Capt. Caldwell—and, forgive my egotism, I am a tall, dark-

complexion'd, and I am sorry to say rather ordinary-looking fellow, bashful, yet proud as any poet should be, and believing with the honest Scotchman that "I hae muckle reason to be thankful that I am as I am." If I should have an opportunity to visit thee I should rejoice at it. If thou shouldst come this way do not fail to call & see us, for, believe me, all would be extremely glad to see thee. A letter from thee would be thankfully receiv'd by

Thy friend,

J. G. WHITTIER.

P. S. Please send the Prospectus as soon as possible.

J. G. W.

Dr. E. Weld,

Hallowell, Me.

A
NEW YEAR'S ADDRESS
TO THE PATRONS
OF
THE ESSEX GAZETTE

*"Is there a hole in a' yere coats,
I rede ye tent it;
A chiel's amang ye, takin' notes,
An' faith he'll prent it!"*

BURNS.

TOWNSMEN and friends! your minstrel would address ye,
Not in the varnish'd language of a flatterer,
Nor, worse than all, maliciously distress ye
With bad reports, or prove a graceless scatterer
Of evil news, to give to waste and pillage,
The reputation of our thriving village.

No! dream not of it—blent with every chord,
That in a heart of deepest feeling thrills,
Is the green vale where Merrimack's stream is pour'd
Through the wild vista of its neighboring hills;—
All's dear to me, quite up and down the river,
With one exception—*Frinksborough*, however.

It should be so. The cold and stony-hearted
 May curse their birth-place, and their homes deride;
 But *this* should live when every thought has parted,
 That tells of youth, and happiness, beside;
 And Haverhill homes are far from *homely* still,
 Whether in *Summer-street* or *Colly Hill*.

Hold! not so fast, Pegasus! lest thy lay
 Exceed the bounds I've mark'd out for my story—
 Yes! now I recollect—I meant to say,
 That time, of late, has not been dilatory;
 But jogging on, a persevering rover,
 Has nearly turn'd old *twenty-seven* over.

Go, then, old year! you cannot be much older,
 And twenty-eight must soon your treasures thrive on;—
 E'en now old time has got ye by the shoulder,
 Ready to send ye headlong to oblivion!
 Yet, still my muse, if nought untoward vex it,
 Shall build a rhyme, at least upon your exit.

And how goes Haverhill? Much the same as usual;—
 The year has made with it no change worth mention;
 But that's all owing to the town's refusal
 To move the school-house, which was the intention
 Of some good folks—I really wish they'd done it,
 For then I'd made a verse or two upon it.

But *years* have made a change. — Where wigwams stood
 And huts of log, fine buildings meet us now.
 Through noisy streets, once darkly cloth'd with wood,
 The tight-laced Miss and self-important beau
 Parade in style, instead of bears and mooses,
 Dark, raw-boned squaws and yellow-faced papooses.

And *times* have changed. — Our ancestors, we know,
 Were *men*, and they had wives who proved a profit,
 Who, handling casks as we do tumblers now,
 Drank from the bung-hole, and made nothing of it.
 Aye! they were *wives*, worth scores of modern beauties,
 Too delicate for vulgar household duties.

Our town's a pleasant one. — 'T is odd, however,
 That strangers say so, since the first that meets them,
 When they have paid their toll across the river,
 Is the old fish-stand, whose vile odour greets them
 In such a style, that I have wonder'd why,
 With 'kerchief'd nose, each did not turn and fly.

We've now two bells, loud ringing on the ear —
 Calling to church, or telling out the time;
 And some, no doubt, esteem it fine to hear
 Their clamorous tintinabulary chime.
 I hate a bell, — the horn of Abram Tyler*
 Once call'd our sires to church in better style, sir.

* *Our ancestors entertained the excellent custom of calling the people to worship by the sounding of a horn. This Abram Tyler was allowed one pound of pork a Sabbath, for performing said duty.*

And bridges, now in gloomy grandeur straddle
 The chainless tide, that rolls itself below;
 But, like a horse, vex'd with an extra saddle,
 Old Merrimack threatens with an overthrow,
 That famous one,* which beats Munchausen's hollow,
 Since but the sight of 't costs us half a dollar.†

Rocks folks are wide awake—their old bridge tumbled
 Some years ago, and left them all forsaken;
 But they have risen, tired of being humbled,
 And the first step towards a new one taken.
 They're all alive—their trade becomes more clever,
 And mobs and riots flourish well as ever.

A steam-boat, too, will shortly sweep the river.
 Like the "wild Dutchman," against tide and breezes.
 "I like it hugely." 'T will be nice and clever
 To go to Newbury when a body pleases!
 But, with the boilers, I can ne'er agree—
 If *one* is dangerous, what will *forty* be?

* *Newburyport Bridge.* The current of the river at that place is very rapid, and it is said to be fast undermining the piers. The probability seems to be, that it will soon "put to sea."

† *A fact.*—See a communication in the *Essex Gazette* of Sept. 29, under the head, "Close Shaving."

Yet, when some twenty couple of both sexes,
 By land or water, take a jaunt for pleasure,
 No cares disturb, no thought of danger vexes—
 In such a time, no one has ever leisure
 For idle fears.—I frankly own, were I there,
 To look for broken *heads* would not be my care.

Shad Parish* still continues much the same;
 The unwearied ghost still watches Country Bridge,
 Or stalks, with clattering teeth and eyes of flame,
 From his old station, up to Peter's Ridge;
 Nay, smile not, reader; but as truth receive it—
 Shad Parish *women* to a *man* believe it.

Well, now I think on 't, that tough fire we had
 Made quite a stir, while burning, in particular—
 It would have frighten'd any one, as bad
 As it did me, to see it perpendicular,
 Some fifty feet above the church spire streaming,
 On the dun clouds, like northern flashes gleaming.

* *East Parish, in Haverhill. There is a tradition current among the lovers of the marvellous, that many years since, a ghost was sent "in quest o' wretches," and ordered to traverse the space between "Country Bridge," and the residence of black Peter, called "Peter's Ridge." The ghost is said to be still doing duty.*

Who that was there has not some tale to tell

Of "hair-breadth 'scapes" from either fire or water?
And what old lady don't remember well

What she was doing, when the news was brought her?
I, too, could tell a tale, much to my credit;
But I forbear, lest some should think I made it.

Whose shoulders did not ache with bucket-handing?

That, like myself, stood half-leg deep in mud,
Forming a line, from Harrod's to the landing,
Struggling as hard as frighten'd people could.
What others lost, I know not—this, I'm sure of—
One half my boot was, in the racket, tore off.

The old *dumbetty* engine, pois'd on high,

Wet all around, but kindly spar'd the fire;
And strangers, dripping, as they hurried by,
Curs'd the old wreck, and bade them push it nigher;
For, like the gun that honest Paddy bore,
It carried all *behind* it—and before.

The ladies, too, came kindly forth to aid us,

Upon our line like frighten'd vixens falling;
And what they lack'd in strength, they fairly made us
Acknowledge, was well answered by their bawling!
But there—I hate a noise—with danger near us,
I think it more becoming to be serious.

We had a fine parade, the Fourth of July—

The grand procession was quite fine to gaze on;
The meeting-house was crowded full, and truly

No one could help admiring Mr. Hazen—
E'en I myself (I wish that I'd been wiser though)
Fell half asleep, and fancied he was Cicero.

O'er Prime's hotel, with most unseemly grin,

A rampant lion held his lofty station—
Eyeing the crowd that madly hurried in,

Thirsty, with listening to the long oration.
'T was harmless, though, being one of that collection
Lord Dexter once had under his direction.

O, gifted Dexter! if the unheeding muse,

Irreverent name, call it but a blunder—
'T would be the height of folly to abuse

One, who was rightly term'd, the world's eighth wonder!
Should I do so, 't would be sad business for me—
Old Plummer's* ghost would surely clapper-claw me!

Next came the muster!—Reader, 't was a sight

To call to mind some ancient tournament.
Booted and spurr'd, each horseman seemed a knight

On some adventure of high peril bent—
Each brought to mind some puissant chief—Sir Brian,
Simon de Montfort, or old Cœur de Lion.

* *Jonathan Plummer, late of Newburyport, Poet-laureate and Chaplain to his Lordship.*

Then came their bands!—and, reader, if thou 'st ever
 Seen sheep unruly, yok'd up two by two,
 Struggling and twisting, surely thou canst never
 Mistake the movements of this motley crew.
 It rain'd and wet them all, that afternoon, Sir,
 And drowned rats ne'er look'd more woe-begone, Sir.

A clan of red men, in their birch canoes,
 Came up, last fall, to pay the town a visit;
 And all our people, startled by the news,
 Throng'd out to meet them.—'T was a sight, exquisite,
 When, chieftain-like, the Falstaff of the band
 Muster'd his ragged company on land.

I went among the rest, since you must know it,
 Eager to see those beings, whom I had
 Sketch'd with the glowing fancy of a poet,
 Tall, dark, and fearless, in their bear-skins clad.
 I went, and saw them, all alive and real,
 And the plain truth destroy'd my *beau ideal*.

I did not like their dress.—“This sight (thought I)
 An ugly lesson to our ladies teaches;”
 For all the women that I chanced to spy
 Wore those uncouth habiliments—*the breeches!*
 I hope our ladies did not mark the fashion—
 If so, their husbands sure will need compassion.

But now for something else. — Our literature
 Comes on with giant strides, where'er we show it —
 In bar and pulpit most profoundly sure,
 And wondrous in the fancy of the poet.
 "P." "W." "Adrian," fam'd for rhyming merit,
 Besiege Parnassus with uncommon spirit.

And there's poor "Donald," blundering with his Scotch,
 Seeking for words, which well he knows will trouble you;
 But then I think his jumbled-up hotch-potch
 Better than all the fine drawn stuff of "W."
 Ours is no place for serious commodities —
 We pass them by, and catch at "Whims and Oddities."

Our politicians boast uncommon merit,
 Of Adams' wiles, the folks at large to warn —
 Take for example, *Gen. Ross's spirit*,
The Ghost of Grattan,* and the voice of O——.
 "'T is passing strange" (I quote the words of Shakspeare)
 If Jackson has not all the fools and rakes here.

And there's the Printer. — If he boldly dares
 To give the knaves a nicely season'd grist, sir,
 Of Jackson plots, each sturdy scoundrel swears
 To serve him as his idol did, *Ambrister* —
 E'en hang him up! — Such threatening doubtless suits
 The Chief, who made a *mirror* of his *boots*.†

* See *Essex Gazette*, of Dec. 1st and 8th.

† See *Gen. Jackson's letter to James Riddle*.

But let him go.—My overwearied muse
Begs for an ending of this hackney'd song,
Where, she, obliged to tell you all the news,
Has glanced on all things, as she jogged along.
If some she's roughly handled, pray forgive it;
But, if she's told the truth, as such receive it.

Townsmen and friends! whate'er your name or station,
May next year bring ye all that is propitious—
Health to the honest, and a reformation
Or prison walls to those who now are vicious.
Farewell to all—priests, lawyers, cobblers, tinkers,
Poets and fiddlers, sober men and drinkers!

Peace to ye all! and if in this adventure,
You should decide that I have acted wisely,
If still my muse retains her power to canter,
You'll hear from me, one year from now precisely;
Meantime, farewell! A happy new year, greet ye,
And duns and toothache, may they never meet ye!

Dec. 31st, 1827, half past eleven.

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